

THE ROLE OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH TEACHING

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Abstract

Classroom teaching learning activity, especially English classroom teaching and learning is a kind of communication between teachers and students. In this course both teachers and students use nonverbal and verbal to communicate consciously and unconsciously. Teachers, especially English teachers, as a bridge to international communication and information-sender, should be strongly aware of the importance of nonverbal communication to promote the English competence of the students

Keywords: nonverbal communication, English teaching

Abstrak

Aktivitas pembelajaran dan pengajaran di kelas, khususnya pembelajaran dan pengajaran bahasa Inggris merupakan suatu bentuk komunikasi antara guru dan siswa. Dalam hal ini baik para guru dan siswa menggunakan komunikasi baik verbal maupun nonverbal baik secara sadar maupun tidak sadar. Pengajar bahasa Inggris seharusnya mempunyai kesadaran secara kuat terhadap pentingnya komunikasi nonverbal untuk meningkatkan kompetensi bahasa Inggris siswa.

Kata kunci: komunikasi nonverbal, pengajaran bahasa Inggris

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is the basis of all human contact, which is central to human life. People communicate in many different ways. One of the most important ways, of course, is through language. Language is a system of arbitrary conventionalized vocal, written, or gestural symbols that enable members of a given community to communicate intelligibly with one another. Brown (2000:250) Communication may be regarded as a combination of acts, a series

of elements with purpose and intent. Communication is not merely an event, something that happens; it is functional, purposive, and designed to bring about some effect—some change, however subtle or unobservable—on the environment of hearers and speakers. Moreover, when language is written it can be completely isolated from the context in which it occurs; it can be treated as if it were an independent and self-contained process.

Your understanding of the components of language determines to a large extent how you teach a language. If, for example, you believe that nonverbal communication is a key to successful second language learning. You will devote some attention to nonverbal systems and cues. If you perceive language as a phenomenon that can be dismantled into thousands of discrete pieces and those pieces programmatically taught one by one you will attend carefully to an understanding of the separability of the forms of language. If you think language is essentially cultural and interactive, your classroom methodology will be imbued with sociolinguistic strategies and communicative tasks (Brown, 2000:6).

Bi Jiwan (1995) states, “Scholars believe that the role of nonverbal communication in classroom teaching is greater than that of formal teaching for students’ learning. Research has indicated that teachers are required to learn to use nonverbal communication to improve classroom teaching. Classroom teaching learning activity, especially English classroom teaching and learning is a kind of communication between teachers and students. In this course both teachers and students use nonverbal and verbal to communicate consciously and unconsciously. Teachers, especially English teachers, as a bridge to international communication and information-sender, should be strongly aware

of the importance of nonverbal communication, because nonverbal behaviors convey many messages in classroom, and become invaluable for teachers in getting the message across to class and understanding the messages of interest or messages of confrontation that students are sending. Their positive nonverbal cues can also influence the teacher’s state of mind and the classroom atmosphere, and further improve the effect of classroom instruction. Generally speaking, the students’ involvement and interest in the subject can be detected from the relaxed faces and smiles. So we can say, nonverbal communication between teachers and students plays an important role in English classroom teaching learning process.

2. NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

We communicate so much information nonverbally in conversations that often the verbal aspect of the conversation is negligible. This is particularly true for interactive language functions in which social contact is of key importance and in which it is not what you say that counts but how you say it—what you convey with body language, gestures, eye contact, physical distance, and other nonverbal messages. Nonverbal communication, however, is so subtle and subconscious in a native speaker that verbal language seems, by comparison, quite mechanical

and systematic. Language becomes distinctly human through its nonverbal dimension, or what, or what Edward Hall (1959) called the “silent language”. The expression of culture is so bound up in nonverbal communication that the barriers to culture learning are more nonverbal than verbal. Verbal language requires the use of only one of the five sensory modalities: hearing. But there remain in our communicative repertoire three other senses by which we communicate every day, if we for the moment rule out taste as falling within a communicative category (Brown, 2000:262).

The majority of nonverbal behaviors is intuitive and is based on normative rules. Except for behaviors such as good manners or etiquette, little formal training is provided for nonverbal communication. Although nonverbal communication has little or no formal structure, it does have a natural set of rules that are recognized through cultural norms. The vast number of changes in organizations and cultural norms remind us that “nonverbal communication is influenced by a number of factors, including cultural background, socioeconomic background, education, gender, age, and personal preferences of idiosyncrasies (Beamer & Varner, 2001:160). Meanwhile, Harris & Nelson (2008:135) states that nonverbal communication, then, is any part of communication that does not use words. Nonverbal communication is so inextricably

bound up with verbal aspects of communication process that we can only separate them artificially. Mass Knapp (1980:18) states, “Generally, when people refer to nonverbal communication, they are talking about the signals to which meaning will be attributed—not the process of attributing meaning ...”.

Nonverbal communication operates in the present and is highly dependent on the context. Both of these phrases apply very specifically to nonverbal communication. “We form instantaneous impressions of people—favorable and unfavorable—based on their facial features, body shape, height, clothing, tone of voice, gaze behavior, use of space, facial expressions, and so on” (Remland, 2003:368).

However, effective human communication falls into two types: verbal communication and nonverbal communication. For a long time, only the former one occurred to us immediately when we discuss human communication, while the latter was neglected to a large extent. In fact, nonverbal communication plays a very important role in human social behavior. Its importance has been fully accounted for by communication theorists. As Henry David Thoreau has ever said that in human intercourse the tragedy begins not when there is misunderstanding about words, but when silence is not understood (Huang, 2011:903). Nonverbal communication is vitally

important to communication effectiveness (Anderson, 1999). Depending on the expert, nonverbal comprises from 93% (Mehrabian, 1983) to 68% (Birdwhistell, 1970) of a message's meaning.

As different linguists describe nonverbal communication in different dimension, there are many ways of categorizing nonverbal communication, they suggested there be three types of nonverbal communication; sign language, action language, and object language. In Michael's book (1984) Bodily communication, nonverbal communication is identical to body language, including facial expressions, gaze, gestures and bodily movement, postures, bodily contact, spatial behavior, clothes, physique and other aspects of appearance and nonverbal vocalizations.

3. NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AND ENGLISH CLASSROOM TEACHING

As discussed above that nonverbal communication plays a very paramount role in human behavior, it remains for from being well understood. The earlier approaches to foreign language teaching and learning were focused on the development of grammatical mastery rather than communicative skills. Most of English teachers used to concentrate on English grammar and vocabulary, ignorant of the practical application of nonverbal communication so that the

students feel the teachers' lectures are boring and they are frequently reluctant to be active in the teaching learning process. With the advancement of linguistic science and teaching methodology research, the idea of developing learners' ability to use the target language for successful communication has become more and more popular. Experts and language teachers have become more and more aware of the effects of nonverbal communication on foreign language teaching. If the teacher's nonverbal communication is vivid and alive, it will be helpful for students' understanding and command of knowledge in the classroom and it's alsomuch easier for students to memorize. All the researchers indicate that the teacher should be in high spirits and active.

Many scholars hold that the nonverbal communication in the class is much more important in the students' study than in the regular teaching itself. If the teachers know well how to use nonverbal actions more effectively, the relationship between the teachers and the students will be improved, the students' cognitive ability and study effect alike. The teachers should improve their English knowledge, applied skill, learning strategies, while cross-culturalcommunication includes the competence of verbal communication and that of nonverbal communication. To be exact, it is composed of three parts: written communication

ability, oral communication ability and nonverbal communication ability. We can understand that nonverbal communication is an integrated part of English classroom teaching. Therefore English teachers should fully realize the role played by nonverbal behaviors, let alone nonverbal behaviors performed by themselves, for the teachers' appropriate nonverbal behaviors not only improve relationship between the teachers and the students, but also set up a good image for the students. For a vivid smile, an encouraging gesture, or a gentle expression in teachers' eyes can be effective tools for the improvement of the relation between teachers and students, which can also consequently improve classroom teaching effect.

4. THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN CLASSROOM TEACHING

A. Kinesics

Every culture and language uses body of language, or kinesics, in unique but clearly interpretable ways. All cultures throughout the history of humankind have relied on kinesics for conveying important messages. The study of how movement communities is called kinesics, or body language. As the most frequent use of nonverbal cues in class, kinesics can lead to the level of effectiveness of

teaching directly. Teachers' smile, nod and pat of students' shoulders can indicate praise, while frown, head-shaking and confusing look mean "no", and students' body language can convey their affection to the teacher and their attitude toward the courses that they learn and toward school's rules. Here we would like to look into some of the more significant movements of kinesics from these five parts in great details. They are facial expressions, eye contact, gesture, as well as touch of teachers.

1) Facial Expressions

Our face provides important information regarding our internal views about how things are going. "The face is the most extraordinary communicator, capable of accurately signaling emotion in the bare blink of a second, capable of concealing emotion equally well" (Blum, 1998:33-34). Facial expressions are largely universal, products of biological imperatives" with six expression—anger, fear, sadness, disgust, surprise and happiness. Facial expression between teachers and students is one of the most important types of nonverbal signals in the classroom.

In English class, the lively facial expression can promote a supportive and non-threatening classroom atmosphere, which aids students' positive attitudes and corresponding

achievement. When the teacher raises a question in English, an expectant expression he shows can encourage students to think carefully and answer actively, and they don't feel afraid, inferior and underpressure when they make mistakes. Sometimes an unconscious frown can make sensitive students correct his answer immediately. It is much better than just saying “No” or “Wrong”, which can protect the students' proper pride. Besides that, a teacher should often smile during teaching learning process, a smiling teacher will make students feel comfortable and the students can enjoy the process of learning as well as possible.

2) Eye Contact

Eye contact is another important aspect of kinesics. We communicate a great deal through our eyes, perhaps more than through any part of the body. As the saying goes, “The eyes are the window of the soul.” Eye contact can express interest, attraction, intimacy, dominance, persuasiveness, aggressiveness, and credibility (Burgoon & Dillman, 195). Why do the eyes have such an impact? First, eye contact serves as simultaneous communication because it allows people to send and receive messages at the same time. Eye contact also is used

to control interaction. This regulating of the flow of the transaction can be simply failing to acknowledge someone's presence. Clearly, the potential for a response from someone is decreased if the amount of eye contact is minimal. In general, eye contact is a powerful means for establishing relationships and indicating an open, honest approach. Once you become more familiar with specific cultural requirements, you can judge how to use eye contact in an English teaching classroom.

There are two kinds of eye contact that the teacher often uses in the classroom. One is looking around, which plays a very useful role in classroom teaching. On the one hand, it can be used to get the students' attention, and to encourage students to think and respond teacher's questions actively. On the other it can used to manage the classroom control. Another kind of eye contact is looking attentively. When the teachers criticizes the students' bad behavior, his eyesight should put on the triangle part of the students' face. By doing so, the teacher will be impressed as serious, careful, and honest.

English class may be a little more special than other classes, because English class requests students to talk more with teachers and classmates, especially in English. Many

students give comments that they feel the most nervous in English class. So when the teacher ask someone to answer question in English class, the messages expressed by his eyes should be more encouraging, more soft, may be just “as warm as spring”. Then the students may feel more relaxed, get more self-confidence and practice their oral English more freely and willingly. A conducive and comfortable atmosphere will help students improve their English better.

3) Gestures

Gestures in an English teaching tend to be evaluated based on how well the movements reinforce or challenge the existing relationship between teachers and students. Using the appropriate gestures for specific situation is important. Power is reinforced through gestures (Remland, 2003). The students are expected to display appropriate attention to teachers through correct facing behaviors. Teachers can manipulate their movements and gestures in order to enhance the quality of the interaction in the English teaching learning process.

Being the most common form of nonverbal behaviors in daily life, we need to understand the gestures of people. A gesture is an expressive motion or action, usually made with the hands and arms, but also with the

head or even the while body. Gesture can occur with or without speech. Some gestures are spontaneous, some are highly ritualized and have very special meanings. It is through gestures that the body speaks. In other words, gestures are closely related to speech, illustrating or supplementing it. Gestures are so common in daily life that attaracts special attention of many experts. They are mostly concerned with speech and other ways of nonverbal communication, but sometimes they can not stand alone. Generally speaking, a speaker uses gestures for two purposes: to reinforce an idea or to help describe something. Through gestures we can express our attitude toward other.

A teacher may be viewed as boring, stiff, and inanimate, if he or she fails to use gestures while speaking. Comparatively, a lively and animated teaching style captures students’ attention, and makes the material more interesting, facilitate learning and provides a bit ofentertainment. In the process of learning, hand and arm movements are often employed to physically depict conceptual, intellectual, abstract, or narrative elements of the presentation. Using gestures in English class can make complex grammar points easier to understand.

B. Paralanguage

The manner in which something is said is paralanguage, which includes accent, emphases, vocal qualities, pitch, rate, pauses, silences, (a form of vocalic behavior), and anything that adds to the meaning we associate with the verbal (Anderson, 1999). Paralanguage includes a large group of behaviors such as pitch, time, rate, silence, and other vocal behaviors provide information about emotions, reinforce meaning, and demonstrate understanding of communication skills expected (Harris & Nelson, 2008:145). Paralanguage “affects not only (people’s) credibility, but their ability to persuade as well (Gass & Seiter, 1999:177).

Paralanguage is the way we vocalize or say the words we speak. The correct use of paralanguage in class is very powerful to the effective teaching and learning. We mainly deal with two aspects in English classroom; nonverbal sounds and pause and silence. The facet of nonverbal sounds, which is often named “vocalparalanguage”, includes such as vocal elements as intonation, tone, pitch, rhythm, volume, pace etc. These elements form a powerful, subtle and vital part of communication. Nonverbal sounds claim a person’s personality characteristics. Effective English teachers are more likely to be good at varying their voice or convey different messages in different situation for different purposes. While teaching, effective English teachers are more inclined to

employ emphatic intonation and few ungrammatical pauses, while the less important one is skimmed through quickly than the ineffective ones. Generally speaking, when there are key points in the process of teaching, or there exists some problems needing emphasized, the teacher can raise his tone and slow down the speed. When in the process of statements, the mid-pitch and low-pitch can be alternatives, and the speed can be raised. When the students seem tired and bored, the teacher should change his tone in time to make them excited again.

In class, when a teacher gives a lecture, he may have a brief pause or silence to achieve the purpose of contrast or emphasis for the presentation. Moreover, a teacher may pause a little when another topic is turned to. A number of teachers may use silence as an effective means to dominate a noisy class. A student may keep silence, when he is uninformed or he is not clear about what a teacher says, or he is unwilling to answer a question. In addition, the silence in language teaching is also a very important aspect in terms of the language rhyme. There exists “The silence is gold.” The change of expression of language refers to the alternative of humor and seriousness, which means that the ideal effect of teaching lies in the change of many kinds of style of language instead of being merely serious or humorous all the time. The feature of the students’ recognition and attention is the

proof of the change of teacher's language style.

C. Spatial Language

Spatial here refers to the distance between teachers and students. As we know, teaching and learning in the classroom is a process of communication and the spatial distance between teachers and students is a “critical factor in the communication process”. Whether the spatial distance between a teacher and his students in class is appropriate or not may affect positively or negatively on teaching and learning process. Most of students feel that the teachers who walks around the room or stands closer to them is perceived as friendly and can make the students more involving in the process of teaching and learning. On the other hand, the teacher can give more attention to the poor students and can motivate them to be active in the learning process. The teachers who manage their class while standing or walking among their students are viewed more effectively than those standing in front of the classroom, and are seen more friendlier and more comfortable than those who stand further from the students.

Based on the daily experience, when the student gets absent-minded or does something irrelevant to the teaching content, the teacher, if permitted, will move forward to the students if he or she does not want to interrupt the communication among the other students. Under this circumstance, the students will get

back to be active in the learning activity. So we can say that the student gives a good response if the teacher is closer to the students when they are teaching. On the other hand the student neglects to the learning activity when the teacher just stands behind the teacher's desk during the process of learning and they are short of involving the learning activity.

5. Conclusions

Based on the discussion above, we can conclude that nonverbal communication plays an important role in the process of teaching and learning process. In English classroom teaching and learning, the teacher should take into account the importance of nonverbal communication to make the process of learning running as well as possible. The effectiveness of teaching and learning process in class, to some extent, depends on the precise use of nonverbal behaviors. As an English teacher, we should realize that an English teaching aims to promote students' cross-cultural communicative competence which consists of verbal and nonverbal communication.

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